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LACKAWANNA BRANCH, PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND, INC.

from
Frank M. Labe, Executive Director
1965

In the past fifteen years public attitudes about blindness have changed slightly. Any blind person who attempts to rent an apartment or a room in a private home, or a blind person who goes to a social gathering, or even walks down the street, will tell you that much work remains to be done.

An agency for the blind which has to go to the public for money to support its activities is in a very unique position. People want to "help those less fortunate" than themselves. Yet, we know that to portray the blind person as an individual groping in the dark, hoping that someone will give him a "helping hand", is most repugnant and far from the actual truth. We believe that the best advertisement of our work is a good product - a blind person who is reasonably self-sufficient, one who understands himself and who can take his place in society. We are not caretakers of the blind. We are people with special knowledge, helping people with special problems.

This is a report of what was done last year to help people solve problems.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Counseling

During 1965 this department placed much emphasis on work with preschool and school age children. Approximately 18 children were served. Adjustment counseling was provided for the children and their parents.

Early in the year a seminar for parents of preschool age, blind children was begun. However, this met with little success, and counseling on an individual basis continued throughout the year.

Severely visually handicapped children attended both the city and the county schools. The social service department worked closely with these schools to assist the school personnel in helping each individual child get the most from his education. The mutual goal was, of course, to help the child prepare for the vocation, profession, or life situation which best meets his individual needs.

This department also worked closely with the Office for the Blind, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, sharing information about cases which needed intensive work. This involved monthly case conferences between the rehabilitation counselor from the Office for the Blind and the Supervisor of Social Services of this agency. This has been quite helpful in providing good and unduplicated service to blind clients who reside in Lackawanna County.

Two hundred twenty-five newly blinded individuals were visited by members of the Social Service department. Some of these people and/or their families received counseling service from this agency.

A total of 421 counseling sessions took place in 1965.

Home-Teaching

Forty-seven people received instruction in specific skills. Two hundred forty-

one braille lessons were given. Ninty-three lessons were provided in typewriting. Many people also received useful information about home-making and personal grooming.

In addition, 22 talking book machines were distributed during the year and 22 people received instruction in the use of the white cane.

Aids and Appliances

There are many devices which have been designed especially for the use of blind people - devices which make it much easier for a person without sight to get along in a sighted world. These are some of the items that were ordered:

4 braille watches	5 insulin syringes
4 kitchen timers	4 dozen self-threading needles
19 collapsible canes	1 clinical thermometer
1 compass	23 miscellaneous items

In addition to the above items, which were paid for by the people ordering them, approximately fifty ordinary white canes were distributed free of charge to people who needed them.

Recreation

Cumulative attendance at PAB - sponsored activities was 1,044. This is 2½ times the participation in 1964, which indicates a definite acceptance of, and need for, those activities which we are initiating. A hiking club, a bowling club, classes in social dancing, and social classes were some of the activities.

The Auxiliary to the Lackawanna Branch sponsored a summer picnic, a Christmas party, and two bingo parties. A total of approximately 250 blind people attended these activities.

The Auxiliary also made it possible for 10 people from Lackawanna County to attend Beacon Lodge, a special vacation camp in central Pennsylvania. Five thousand copies (four issues) of The Flashback, a newsletter about PAB activities, were mailed last year to Lackawanna County blind people.

PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS

Remedial Eye Care

Three hundred thirty-eight people received eye care from this agency. These services included:

121 Eye Examinations
165 Pairs of Glasses
122 Repairs to Glasses

These services supplement the services that are available from the state government.

There is an eye clinic at the Scranton State General Hospital. During the past year it became apparent that this clinic was overloaded with inappropriate referrals. The physicians who contribute their skill are not able to make proper use of the time that they spend at the clinic. The eye medical staff and the administration of the hospital, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and this agency are in the process of developing procedures that will remedy the situation and make it possible for the eye clinic to more adequately fulfill its function.

Low Vision Aids

In 1965 we continued this service, which was started in 1964. This is a service for people with severe visual limitations whose eye condition cannot be corrected medically or with normal glasses. A large selection of magnifiers and low vision aids are available at the Association and a staff member who has knowledge in this subject has been working with each patient on the selection of the proper glass. Late in the year, we began working with a noted specialist in the field, and a staff member has been accompanying patients to this eye doctor's office in Wilkes-Barre for the fitting of special lenses.

In 1965 approximately 15 people made use of this service and we expect that the number will increase in 1966.

Preschool Vision Screening

Last summer we were approached by a group of citizens who were concerned about the problems of amblyopia detection in preschool age children. We were asked by this group if we would assist them in the conducting of preschool vision screening programs. Two meetings were held with these people and the purpose of vision screening, as well as the problems, were outlined. The board of directors of this agency agreed that we should do more work in the prevention of blindness. Plans have been initiated with the Health and Welfare Council of Lackawanna County in cooperation with the Scranton Lackawanna Human Development agency for the establishment of a Community Action Program for the prevention of blindness. Part of this project will be, specifically for the employment of a professional person to train volunteers and to organize, and supervise a preschool vision screening program. This work has been proceeding satisfactorily.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

PAB staff members addressed 21 groups in 1965 with a cumulative audience of over 700 people. These presentations were to professional, as well as civic and other groups. They included student nurses, college students, and staff members from other agencies.

Thirty-eight news stories were published in the local press about the Association and its activities. Nineteen of these articles dealt specifically with activities of the Association on behalf of the welfare of blind people and the prevention of blindness. The other articles were concerned with Education Days and the Dream Game.

Members of the agency manned an exhibit at May Aug Park during Zoo Festival Days. We exhibited braille devices, special aids and appliances, low vision optical aids, sight conservation and Eye Bank material. There was much interest in the display. The Pennsylvania Association for the Blind was also featured at one of the LUF report meetings this fall.

INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL

Activity

Fourteen blind people were employed in the workshop and sales program at different times during the year. \$10,738.50 was paid in direct labor wages and commissions to these people. This is an increase of 40% over last year's figure.

The workshop production was:

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The workshop production was:

Drapery made	517	Drapery people manufactured	1,700
Garments repaired	100	Drapery people manufactured	1,700
Tea towels manufactured	284		

*(The manufacture of tea towels was discontinued early in the year because of increasing drapery business.)

Retail sales were lower than in 1964, but the reduced volume of business combined with reduced selling cost made it possible for this department to break even while providing full time jobs for three blind people.

The Future

During 1966, our Board of Directors will be reviewing our existing services and making recommendations for the future. The sheltered workshop will, of course, also be reviewed. The following observations are made with this review in mind.

In America today the accent is on bigness, integration, and large numbers. The theme locally has been: "prevent duplication of resources and overlapping of effort." The sheltered workshop has a vital role to play in the rehabilitation of severely handicapped people. It is true that there are many inherent problems in the operation of a small workshop, but there are also many benefits for the special groups that the small workshop serve.

The blind person who has never worked in his life, or who has not worked for a long period of time, usually has extreme difficulty in adjusting to the discipline and regimen which is essential in the large production workshop. At the present time there are two people working in our shop who came to us after failing in another program. There are three people working here who are employed in the sales department. One of these people formerly operated a food service in a local factory where, it was found, he was not suited for that type of work. There are three people employed as chair-caners. There is a senior citizen who is blind and likes to work in the shop occasionally to fill his leisure time. There have been blind people with problems not directly connected with employment who, because of their employment in this shop, had easy access to the services of our specialized social service department. Because they have been in this building, these people have received benefits far in excess of employment itself.

On the other hand, segregation for its own sake is not desirable, and we suggest that an integrated workshop for mentally and physically handicapped people, located in a "village" for the handicapped and operated in conjunction with a residence, is a return to the "working home" concept of the last century, and is segregation of the worst kind.

Perhaps a way can be found for a small workshop such as ours to have the benefit of the technical and administrative knowledge of a larger shop and yet retain the advantage of identification with a specific handicap, and the advantage of an in-town location.

